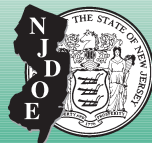


CHILDHOOD WEIGHT STATUS

NEW JERSEY 2003-2004



New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services • September 2004, Issue -1

Clifton R. Lacy, M.D., Commissioner

"Our best hope is to prevent children from becoming overweight in the first place. We need to help children develop healthy eating and activity patterns that will last a lifetime."

Former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher

The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity 2001

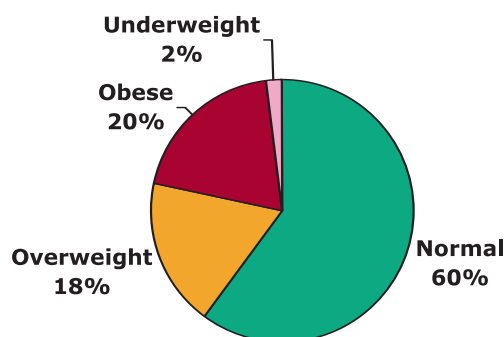
Obesity in childhood is a growing global concern and New Jersey is not exempt. In the United States, in the last thirty years, the percentage of overweight youth has doubled for ages 6-11 and tripled for ages 12-19. According to the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), 15 percent of children aged 6-11, and 12-19, are obese. Obesity places young people at risk for life-long health problems including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, early heart disease, stroke, asthma, depression and diabetes. It is a serious health threat that poses an equally significant economic burden on society. Additionally, a young person's health is associated with his/her academic performance. Since childhood patterns of nutrition and physical activity are key factors in obesity prevention, early intervention is important.

In June 2002, the New Jersey Childhood Obesity Roundtable was convened by the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) to determine the extent of the youth obesity problem in the state. Roundtable participants learned that public school nurses regularly collect student height and weight data; however, this information has not been accessible for evaluation at the state level.

Following the Roundtable, a team from the DHSS and New Jersey Department of Education (DOE) developed a retrospective records survey to establish a baseline estimate of weight status of school age children in order to guide state policy, program planning and evaluation. This study analyzed 2,393 sixth grade records from 40 randomly selected public schools from varying socio-economic strata.

New Jersey results indicate that 60 percent of sixth grade students are of normal weight. Twenty percent of sixth grade students are obese and eighteen percent of sixth grade students are overweight.

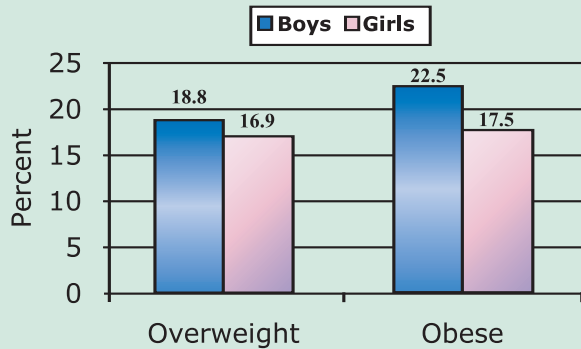
60 percent of New Jersey sixth grade youth are of normal weight.



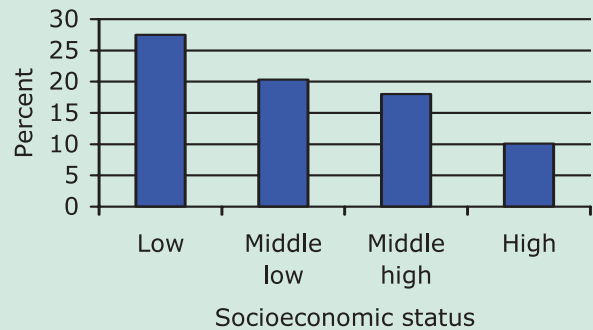
***definitions:** in children and teens, body mass index (BMI) is used to assess weight status. BMI is based on growth charts for age and gender. The BMI was used in this study to categorize sixth grade students.

Source: US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity. BMI-for-Age tables are available at <http://cdc.gov/nccdphp/dnpa/bmi/bmi-for-age.htm>

In sixth grade, boys have higher obesity levels than girls.

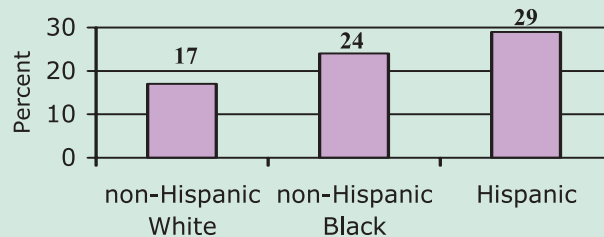


Obesity is higher in low socioeconomic districts



To improve medical screening and intervention practices, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that pediatric care providers calculate and plot body mass index (BMI) for age once a year for all children and adolescents, and to use change in BMI to identify excessive weight gains and the need for intervention.

Obesity is a serious problem in sixth grade students of all racial/ethnic groups



What WE Can Do To Influence Youth

- **Set an example** by modeling good eating and physical activity behaviors on a regular basis. Children need to be active at least 60 minutes every day. Adults need to be active at least 30 minutes every day.
- **Involve** the whole family in physical activities.
- **Support** physical education in schools.
- **Encourage** schools and communities to provide time for physical activity during the school day.
- **Advocate** for the use of school facilities before school, after school and during vacations for physical activity opportunities for all members of the community.
- **Eat** 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- **Advocate** for the adoption of school policies that guide the types of foods offered for sale or free promotion on school property during the school day and at school events (includes school lunch, snacks and vending machines).
- **Decrease** screen (TV, video and computer) hours for all.

For more information on this survey and on programs including Healthy Choices-Healthy Kids, Action for Healthy Kids and Get Fit New Jersey, contact DHSS at 609 292-1723.